Article

Structural Racism and Racialization of Roma/Ciganos in Portugal: The Case of Secondary School Students during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to contribute to the analysis of the structural racism and racialization that exists in Portugal against Roma people. Racialization takes place in various dimensions of life, but we will focus here on issues of schooling and education, which were accentuated during the COVID-19 pandemic and revealed a lack of social deprotection and inequalities between Roma and non-Roma students. This analysis, focusing on the impact on young people attending secondary education, is based on a qualitative study carried out in the Metropolitan Areas of Lisbon and Porto using data from three focus groups and in-depth interviews with 33 secondary school students. Several public policies currently cover the Roma/Ciganos, but social inequality persists in terms of basic subsistence conditions and civic participation, as well as in the form of structural racism, with little Roma participation in political life and the invisibility of representation. The situation has worsened exponentially due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the combination of "classic" forms of racism and discrimination and the new forms of exclusion that have also appeared. We argue that the implicit acceptance of poverty and marginalization among Roma people needs to be viewed as a component of the racialization and antigypsyism to which they are subjected, and this dimension needs to be further investigated by scientific agendas.

Keywords: Ciganos/Roma; racism; social inequalities; COVID-19 pandemic; Portugal

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1. Introduction

Portuguese Roma are the biggest victims of racism in Portugal and of socio-economic vulnerability, constantly confronted with xenophobic, racist attitudes and hate speech by extreme right-wing political party members, as well as with hate comments on social networks. Systemic and historical racism toward Roma is rooted in the social structures of Portuguese society (Mendes 2007; Bastos et al. 2007; Marques 2013). The resurgence of racist narratives, which incite hatred towards Roma people, are offensive and humiliating, and legitimize structural and institutional inequalities, shows that throughout history, Roma have been one of the main targets of historically systematic and structural discrimination rooted in society and in the main institutions (Mendes 2007). These forms of everyday racism are deep-rooted in Portuguese society, manifesting in everyday situations and contexts in the lives of Roma people (Magano 2010) and frequently seen as trivial, "normal" and legitimate (Mendes 2007).

In 2020, the world was confronted with a global pandemic that had and continues to have an impact in all countries, not only in terms of people infected with the disease and the death toll, but also due to its repercussions in diverse areas of daily and structural life, such as employment and access to foodstuff and basic services. While we are experiencing

a situation that embodies a threat to each and every one of us, worldwide, there are strong asymmetries in the way that the virus affects different social groups and how people deal with and manage these impacts.

The lockdown measures implemented by governments meant that a large number of people have been prevented from exercising their professional activities, with the consequent loss of income, in many cases by 100%. It should be noted that the closing of schools and the wholesale adoption of online teaching are based on the assumption that all families are able to source the necessary materials and technological resources to meet these new educational needs.

This article seeks to expand our knowledge about a phenomenon that is still relatively unknown, the persistence of the racialization processes of Roma people that are reflected more sharply in times of social and economic crisis. Indeed, to date, there are not yet any studies analyzing or assessing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic among ethnic cultural minorities, such as in the case of the Portuguese Roma and the reinforcement of racism and discrimination against Roma within the pandemic context.

For the Portuguese Roma, the pandemic scenario has been even more serious, because, in addition to exacerbating the banalization of anti-Roma attitudes, it has meant that the families who lived under precarious conditions before the pandemic have experienced a further worsening of their already disadvantaged position. In fact, many Roma parents have low schooling levels or are illiterate, and simply do not have the technological resources and digital knowledge to enable their children or young people to follow the educational path established for the academic year. In the context of this analysis, the argument of this article is based on the idea that the implicit acceptance of the poverty and marginalization of the Roma people should be considered as a relevant dimension to the process of racialization and antigypsyism to which they are subjected.

Based on the testimonies of Roma students who are resident in the metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto and attend secondary education, and of various participants in focus groups, we sought to examine the impacts of the pandemic on education pathways, taking into account not only the social inequalities and the role of public policies, but also exploring the responses of the school system, of the young people and of their families in relation to the challenges facing them.

1.1. Race and Racism against Roma

Race constitutes a semantic nucleus around which identity systems (individual, group, national) and ideological systems of social organization are organized. Race remains an organizing idea/principle for the social and political life of human communities. It is still a criterion for the access and distribution of socially significant resources. Race discourse can often be used to mobilize individuals and groups in the struggle for power and for economic and political resources, and can be a platform for class action (Anthias 1990). In this regard, it is important to underline that racial classifications themselves are triggered and updated with the aim of defending privileges, limiting access to power, and regulating competition for access to socially and politically scarce positions and resources (Banton 1991).

The race category continues to be a sociologically relevant variable, insofar as the observable physical and biological traits (skin color, hair texture, etc.) are social notions that shape attitudes and behaviors. There has been a persistent trend for some time toward making race an element of ethnicity, which is nothing more than a strategy to hide segregationist intentions (Oommen 1994).

Racism encompasses a wide spectrum of phenomena, since it refers not only to aspects of an ideological order (forms of biological, social and cultural classification and hierarchization), but also to the unintended practices and processes of unexpected consequences (institutional racism), extending its meaning to all practices and activities that lead to the subordination and continued exclusion of a given group, and to maintaining the domination of one group over another (Miles and Brown 2003). This

inflation is explained by historical reasons that are rooted in the interdependence of capitalist development, at the expense of the exploitation of colonized populations (before the 20th century), and in the perpetuation of mechanisms of subordination, with the exploitation of immigrants from the periphery by the center (Miles and Brown 2003). Over time, the concept has gained sophistication and complexity and, in parallel with its inflation, Miles and Brown (2003) allude to its conceptual deflation, claiming that, being more than a doctrine, racism must be defined narrowly as an ideology in order to have some operational and analytical value. Thus, although in the public arena there is a loss of importance of the belief that there is a biological hierarchy of races, the "race" discourse continues as a kind of "myth of eternal return", accentuating the somatic traits and the attribution (positive or negative) of certain characteristics to certain groups. The reification of racial and cultural difference remains, even though the basic referents of racial discourse are no longer biological aspects. Racist discourse uses ethnic categorizations, built around cultural, linguistic, territorial and supposedly biological boundaries, perceived as an immutable and deterministic difference (Anthias 1990). From Banton's perspective, when someone defines another person as belonging to another racial category, he is simultaneously giving him rights and obligations different from those attributed to members of the subject's category of belonging (Banton 1991).

Salomos and Back (1996) show racism as an exclusionary practice that can take different forms. Wieviorka (1992) also points out that racism can be even more virulent when cultural difference becomes inseparable from social exclusion, as, for example, in the case of Roma.

It seems important to maintain the distinction between racism, discrimination and segregation, although divergent positions are found in this regard. For Michel Wieviorka (1992) discrimination and segregation are nothing more than concrete manifestations of racism. Segregation refers to practices that place the racialized group at a distance and separate, reserving its own, more or less restricted spaces, while discrimination imposes a different treatment on the racialized group in different areas of social life, lowering the ways and forms according to which one participates. Racial discrimination thus refers to the unequal and unfavorable treatment of individuals, taking into account their racial origins. In addition to race, other criteria from which discriminatory behavior can be generated are color, ancestry, national or ethnic origin, etc.

However, Roma are very susceptible to everyday racism, which is not only manifested in impersonal and anonymous relationships, it also extends to the institutional sphere. The concept of everyday racism thus allows its articulation at the micro-level (personal experience) and the macro-level (institutional and ideological structures), thus perceiving and perpetuating its continuity (Oommen 1994). For Essed (1991), this type of racism materializes in a form of diversity ideology that underlies the anti-racist (flagrant) norm. The author goes further and explains her manifestations: the objectification of the Other, overestimating and exaggerating differences; the cultural defamation of the Other, implying it is inferior and uncivilized; she also alludes to what she calls "Eurocentrism". This ideology of diversity is based on the objectification of the Other, tending to overestimate and exaggerate differences, and it is often seen that these differences are more felt than they are communicated and verbalized.

In addition, threat theory (Stephan and Stephan 2000) considers that different types of threats correspond to different levels of prejudice against "outgroups". For example, realistic threats are related to issues of political power, economic resources and the ingroup's physical and material well-being. The symbolic threat is related to differences between groups in terms of morals, values, beliefs and attitudes (Devos et al. 2002). According to this model, in certain circumstances, these two types of threat are predictors of attitudes towards Roma or immigrants (Mendes 2007).

1.2. The Racialization of Portuguese Roma

Article 13 of the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic establishes that all citizens have the same social dignity and are equal before the law, and that no one can be privileged, benefited, harmed, deprived of any right or exempt from any duty due to ancestry, sex, race, language, territory of origin, religion, political or ideological beliefs, education, economic situation, social status or sexual orientation.

The frequent declarations that Portugal is not a racist country are recurrent considering its colonial past and the coexistence of different peoples and cultures (Marques 2007), which refers to a certain illusion of easy "Lusotropicalist" coexistence and reveals the denial of racism in Portugal as an ideological and political construction. This ideology gives the Portuguese special abilities in terms of relations with other peoples, namely, with Africans (Vala 1999). The idea that the Portuguese are endowed with a special, radical tolerance, according to Corkill and Eaton (1999, pp. 159–60), "in Portugal's imperial past", aligns with the common claim that "racism does not exist or (at worst) is less pervasive among Southern Europeans".

Over time, the image that persists of Roma is a negative one, since the first complaints that reached the Cortes more than 5 centuries ago to all the measures introduced in the legislative framework until the implementation of its democratic system (25 April 1974). Regarding the Roma population, it seems evident that there is a widespread attitude of blatant racism, and it is even possible to obtain statements in which their perception as a threat and a refusal of any intimacy is clear (Pettigrew and Meertens 1993). However, it is also true that this attitude is combined with forms of subtle racism such as, for example, the tendency to exaggerate differences and the refusal of positive feelings towards Roma. In our view, a double perspective is widespread in this society: on the one hand, there are representations that associate the group with a certain romanticism and mysticism; on the other hand, a tendency that is negative and strongly rejects Roma.

In the case of Roma, they are confronted by racism with a differential configuration that has its sources in the "heavy prejudices of the past, both in the changes suffered by Portuguese society and by their own ways of life" (Marques 2007, p. 19). Roma are the target of discriminatory racism reflected/manifested in forms of structural and institutional racism. Although racism in the classic sense (biological differentiation) has fallen into disuse or is no longer politically correct, these forms of racism have given rise to other forms of racism, called neo-racism, cultural racism or subtle racism (Marques, 2007).

After 1945, the designation "Roma race" was replaced by the more neutral term of "ethnicity" (Marques 2007) on the basis of what Bader (2008) calls "ethnisms", but this is not just a way to mask the deterministic conception of human behavior. In other words, it consists of enclosing members of minorities in essential categories, supposedly permanent and immutable, with which certain ways of thinking and acting would be associated. This "closure" in homogeneous and essentialist social categories is at the basis of stereotypes and prejudices (Goffman [1963] 1988). This mental scheme persists and is triggered against Roma people.

1.3. Public Policies to Promote the Citizenship and Equality of Portuguese Roma

In Portugal, public policies are universal to all citizens, but ethnic and cultural minorities are not recognized by the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic. Accordingly, there are no public policies exclusively directed at Roma people. Indeed, it has only been since the National Strategy for Integration (ACIDI 2013) that the first set of specifically directed measures have arisen under the auspices of the High Commission for Migration, rather than actually placed within the corresponding government ministries. The National Strategy for the Integration of Roma, drawn up in Portugal, is based on four intervention axes: health, education, housing and employment, and vocational training. This strategy was reviewed in 2018[1] as it was recognized that, despite the societal

evolution experienced over the last few years, there are still persistently high levels of discrimination, poverty and social exclusion experienced by many Roma people and families, in addition to strong ignorance about the Roma and mistrust between non-Roma and Roma people. This new strategy sought to foster an improvement of the indicators on the wellbeing and integration of Roma people, and to improve mutual trust, positive interaction and the deconstruction of stereotypes. The National Strategy of 2013 provided the necessary framework for dialogue between the public administration, Roma people and the civil society organizations that work for and with these communities. Nevertheless, in the meantime, it was felt that changes should be made both to the definition of the strategy, especially in the clarification and operationalization of the measures, and to the determination of priority areas of intervention, namely, gender equality, knowledge on Roma people, and their participation in the implementation of this strategy (ENICC 2018).

1.4. Persistence of Low Levels of Education as a Racialized Process

Despite the concern that European and Portuguese government authorities have shown over the past few years in relation to the inequalities in access to and exercise of citizenship by Roma people, there are still persistent problems of poverty and exclusion, and it is among these people that we find the most extreme cases of poverty, illiteracy and social discrimination (European Commission 2004; ERRC/NÚMENA 2007; FRA 2012). The most recent reports of the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) continue to reveal the deprived situation in which the Roma people live throughout Europe and, likewise, the Roma people in Portugal, exacerbated by the attitudes of segregation and racism to which they are subject (FRA 2014, 2018a, 2018b). It is still possible to observe situations of blatant racism and subtle racism (Pettigrew and Meertens 1993) against Roma people.

Nevertheless, the social policy measures implemented over these past years have been insufficient to effectively and structurally overcome the problems faced by Roma people, to a large extent because they are not adapted to Roma particularities but are instead universalist, inadequate and fail to address the cultural features and social origins of the different users and beneficiaries (ERRC/NÚMENA 2007; Santos 2013; Mendes et al. 2014).

While there are no statistical data on the Portuguese Roma population, due to the collection of ethnic data or data of any other differentiation not being permitted by Portugal's Constitution, there are fragmented datasets that enable piecing together a portrayal, both sociodemographic and regarding living conditions (Mendes et al. 2014).

Regarding the schooling of Roma people, although there has been a widespread increase of the basic level of education, schooling levels continue to be much lower than for the rest of the population. The mandatory schooling established in Portugal, with the completion of secondary education (12th year of schooling and compulsory permanence in the school system up to the age of 18), is quite beyond the expectations of many Portuguese Roma young people. School continues to be seen as a place, above all, for children and adolescents, rather than for young or fully grown adults (Magano and Mendes 2016). The new data gathered at a national level by the Directorate General of Education and Science Statistics (DGEEC 2020) of the Ministry of Education was published based on a survey sent out to schools in mainland Portugal regarding the academic year of 2018/2019, in which 808 schools answered, with a response rate of 99%. The overall picture is similar to the findings of previous studies, where only 2.6% of the Ciganos attending public education are enrolled in secondary education.

There are high rates of Roma pupils repeating the year, on average 15.3% (22.1% in the first cycle and 17.7% in the second cycle), in addition to regional disparities. The highest school retention rates are in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area with 23.5%, in Alentejo 22.3%, in Algarve 21.9%, and 9.5% in the north (DGEEC 2020).

The DGEEC (2020) highlighted early school-leaving by Roma children and youth, and two DGEEC studies, from 2016–2017 (DGEEC, 2018) and 2018–2019 (DGEEC 2020), demonstrate that this figure shifted from 5.9% to 8.1%, meaning that early school-leaving has increased.

2. Methods and Fieldwork

The EDUCIG project—school performance among the Roma: research and co-design project[2], underway up to 2021—primarily aims to identify and understand the school trajectories of Roma students integrated into secondary education in the Metropolitan Areas of Lisbon and Porto, as well as their aspirations of accessing higher education. This project is planned to take place over various stages of methodological implementation, to gain an understanding of the constraining factors and the school trajectories of these students, combining quantitative, qualitative and participatory methods. To this end, the survey involved two questionnaires sent out to the teachers and persons in charge of public schools, and to the employments and vocational training staff of the Instituto do Emprego e Formação Profissional, I.P. (IEFP). In-depth interviews were also conducted with the Choices Program staff, with young Roma of both sexes, and various ethnographies, focused on the daily life of young students, enabling a non-intrusive capture of the tensions, dilemmas and opportunities they experience as they move within different relational spheres (Roma and non-Roma).

The pandemic situation caused by COVID-19 constrained the continuation of the fieldwork of the EDUCIG project, requiring methodological readjustments both for interviewing young people and conducting focus groups, as the project had primarily envisaged the application of participatory methods.

The first part of the research was undertaken between 2019 and 2020 and was mainly based on a qualitative approach. A total of 33 interviews were undertaken (21 male and 12 female). Some interviews were conducted in person, but others were conducted via Zoom during the first lockdown (between March and May 2020). The main topics of the interview were their personal life history (namely, places of residence and mobility, and the structure of their own family and work), the characterization and history of the family of origin (in terms of education, professional occupations, ethnic attribution), their relationship with the school (school career, experiences of discrimination), free time and leisure, religious practices, associative sports, cultural and recreational practices, future expectations, and opinions about strategies to improve the situation of young Roma in school during the first lockdown. These topics were selected according to a snowball approach; in addition, we carried out three focus groups from March to July 2020.

2.1. Focus Groups: Procedures and Composition

At this point, we reflect on the perspectives of participants in the study concerning the impact of COVID-19 on the developments of the academic year, and how this reflects social inequalities between Roma and non-Roma students. We were interested in knowing what they have to say about their family and scholastic situation due to COVID-19, and how they overcame the problems. The data came from focal groups held via the Zoom digital platform with young Roma students, parents and other social intervenors. Three focus groups were held, aimed at reflecting on some of the results obtained in previous stages of our research, such as the statistical analysis of the online questionnaires, the content analysis of the in-depth interviews and the ethnographic work. The objective of these focus groups was to discuss our main findings up to that date, to enable a diagnosis of the need for training and employment suited to the profile of young Roma, and to foster the collective sharing of opinions, clarify points of view and indicate guidelines for the design of a training offer. We also sought to appraise the Roma students' perceived difficulties in education pathways regarding underachievement, logistical support, the reasons underlying demotivation and dropout, and feelings of discrimination; discuss the reasons that enabled certain young people to continue their education pathways beyond

the ninth year of schooling; identify the training needs of professionals who work with young Roma (teachers, program/project staff); identify critical factors and successful practices for schooling processes, and appraise the most pertinent features, format and contents in the design of a certified training program equivalent to the 12th year of schooling, directed at 15- to 18-year-old Roma who dropped out of school before completing compulsory education. These young people reveal the embedded perception of difference, that they are victims in society in the sense developed by Wieviorka (2002), and that our societies welcome and reproduce differences but also often invent them under the weight of tradition.

The composition of the three focus groups tried to reflect a diversity of geographic regions of residence of the participants (Metropolitan Area of Lisbon and Porto), to select participants with different education pathways and contrasting socioeconomic backgrounds (in the cases of group 1 and 2) and have gender-balanced groups. We also tried to ensure that the focus group participants had not been involved in previous research stages (interviews with young secondary school and higher education students, technical staff and teachers, Choices project coordinators, mediators and activists).

Due to the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was necessary to adjust our methodology, with the focus groups being conducted online through the Zoom platform. Moreover, the circumstances of the state of emergency and the material constraints hampered the harmoniously planned participation of those invited to join these groups.

2.2. Data Analysis

The scripts of the focus groups were designed, taking into account the results of the project's previous tasks. The content analysis was carried out using MAXQDA, and the classification into categories followed the aspects and concepts outlined in the focus group script. Data were coded collectively using a systematic thematic analysis approach to identify the key themes raised by respondents. This involved interpretive code-and-retrieve methods wherein the data were transcribed, coded, and an interpretative thematic analysis was undertaken. This code system was devised using MAXQDA. We followed the same standardized procedure for collecting information in each of the territories.

Group 1 comprised young Roma students attending secondary education or in their first year of higher education, with contrasting education pathways and lifestyles. Group 2 involved families, mediators, activists and association members, where we sought to incorporate families with diverging lifestyles with youth at secondary school, ensure balanced gender and residency in the two metropolitan areas, and include school mediators, activists and association members with experience in working with young students. Group 3 involved the participation of project staff, teachers and technical staff of the Priority Intervention Educational Territories (TEIP) program; project staff (Choices and other locally based projects) who work on a daily basis with young students in the metropolitan areas, and are engaged in firmly rooted and continuous work with the Roma people; secondary schools attended by Ciganos; and TEIP schools**.** Group 1 had three participants, aged between 19 and 20 years old, two being male and one female, coming from different parts of the country: Lisbon Metropolitan Area (Cascais), Porto Metropolitan Area (Maia) and Castelo Branco (Idanha-a-Nova). Two of the participants attend higher education and one participant had just completed his 12th year of regular education. In Group 2, interviews were conducted with parents of Roma students attending various education levels, including secondary and higher education, activists within the Roma families, Roma cultural mediators and evangelical pastors, where these different roles very often intersect. This group consisted of 11 people, five men and six women, aged between 20 and 55 years old. Two of the group members live in the Porto Metropolitan Area and the rest in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, within which different zones were represented. Group 3 was composed of 10 participants, reflecting varied ages from 24 to 50 years old. We sought to diversify sex and municipality of residence and/or

territories of action by having seven female participants and three male participants, two of whom live in Lisbon (Vila Franca de Xira is the municipality of residence of one of the female participants, but the municipality of action of the project in which she works is Lisbon) and the rest are from the north of the country (Porto, Vila Nova de Gaia, Matosinhos and Espinho). In terms of schooling level, they all possess higher education, except for one of the participants, a Roma intercultural mediator with 9th year schooling.

3. Findings

During the pandemic, one extreme right-wing political party and its leader called for differentiated measures to be imposed on clusters of Roma families, specifically, forced "sanitary cordons"[3]. However, this was not an isolated case; when faced with an outbreak in a council housing neighborhood inhabited by Roma, several representatives of local government, even of the center-left political forces, namely, those of the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, advocated the need to apply a sanitary cordon, stating that "[The cordon] would ensure that they remain confined inside their homes, which is difficult because they have many children and are constantly outdoors" (local government representative) (Moreira 2020).

Portugal decreed its first state of emergency in the pandemic scenario, covering six weeks in March and April, and face-to-face classes were stopped in mid-March, with the majority of Portuguese students not having returned to school in the academic year of 2019–2020. It was expected that the students and their families should manage, using their own means, to provide the necessary material, digital and supporting circumstances for educational purposes. Portuguese students were all treated equitably, in the same way, regardless of their material living conditions, with the impact in terms of failure to pass the year and dropout numbers being as yet unknown.

3.1. The Pandemic Impacts on Schooling Paths

In this article, we shall present some of the findings arising from the exploratory analysis of the focus groups and regarding the impact of the pandemic on daily school life and family life. It is important to clarify that this technique does not involve a collection of individual interviews but is instead "synergetic", based on structured discussion with different participants in which there is a collective sharing of opinions and elucidation of points of view, with the data being generated from the group interaction between the participants (Rabiee 2004).

3.2. Perspectives on the Pandemic

3.2.1. Perspective of the Students

Various topics were addressed in these focus groups; however, regarding the impact of COVID-19 on school and family life, despite being directly asked about this issue, none of the young people were invested in the differences and/or difficulties experienced at a family level. Only one of the female participants complained about having a "noisy" family, which made it difficult for her to concentrate on schoolwork and attend classes:

> "It's like this, I live with a very noisy family; really, we even have a parrot making even more noise, so, it was horrible, I couldn't do the lessons, I couldn't study, it was too noisy and the teachers didn't… I simply couldn't participate in the lessons, because my teachers are not, in general, they're not people who… who allow the students to participate, but here it was enormously obvious, they just dumped content for three hours." (Young woman, 19 years old, higher education, Maia).

The focus centered primarily on assessing the difference between face-to-face and online teaching, rather than on the difficulties experienced in material terms. There is a preference for face-to-face teaching because online teaching has caused a drop in academic

performance ("my average grade fell", commented a young female Roma participant in the group).

Nevertheless, two important factors were addressed, relative to the social impacts of the pandemic among Roma children and young students. The first, in the words of that young woman, has to do with the pre-existing social inequalities which the pandemic exposed:

> "For example, something that… that I think was very [unrecognized] in distance learning were the many social inequalities… as I was saying, there are many… many Roma families that do not have access to electricity, to water, etc., and many students have been at a loss during this… these months, due to the fact that they literally have no way of learning anything." (Young woman, 19 years old, higher education, Maia).

However, one of the young men offered some clues regarding the social impacts of the pandemic that are not as visible to the naked eye as the short-term impacts and consequences, since they refer to the long-term impacts. This young man noted that, in terms of inter-peer social relationships, at the university, he viewed his Roma identity as an instrument able to change mentalities: before the pandemic, he thought that he would be able to counter some racist comments about the Roma people by stating that he was a Roma in higher education. Due to the pandemic, this participant felt that a step backward had been taken along his path of friendships and the dissemination of Roma culture, and in the symbolic capital he had been accumulating at university.

3.2.2. Perspective of School Agents

The participants in Group 3 highlighted the double impact of COVID-19 in school life. One of these impacts refers to the planning of the academic year's activities, which is common to the entire school community; namely, having to plan the activities of an academic year in an unpredictable and unprecedented scenario for both students and teachers:

> "Right now, for example, I can give you a very ordinary example, what are we doing at school at the moment? We are planning an upcoming year in three different ways for contexts that are still unknown to us, we are trying to do a PAA, which is an annual activities' plan, according to a completely different situation, like the one we are currently experiencing, in which many of the activities can't be done as the rules are completely different. And we don't know the context of our students…" (Teacher, Vila Nova de Gaia).

The other impact, extremely specific to Roma families (and other social and economically deprived households), has to do not only with the structural material conditions (such as not having access to computers or the internet to follow remote lessons), but also family conditions regarding the ability to provide support for homework, the encouragement and actual motivation to continue studying during confinement, or even in terms of knowing how to handle the technology. This issue was brought out by an intercultural mediator, as a member of the technical staff of a local support project, who recounted the way he sought to get around and minimize this impact during quarantine:

> "(…) if the majority community was frightened, let's say, was affected by the pandemic, it was even more worrying in the Roma community. So, some people are doing school online, but there are people who don't have a computer, people who don't know their way around the technology, don't know how to handle computers. So, we decided, as a street project, to go to each home. The teachers send us the files, the homework, and we went to each home distributing it to people who didn't have a computer or who didn't know how to work with

computers. We distributed the homework, helped the children, encouraged them to study and then we had a day for collecting it. As technical staff, we sent this homework to the teacher. We have had some success throughout this period; nowadays, some children even ask us if we are sick, if we have… and we say 'No, school has finished', now we're going to continue with the street project, yes, with some recreational activities, with children and young people…" (Intercultural mediator, Porto).

Curiously enough, the teachers and mediators did not refer to difficulties in giving lessons online (maybe because among the participants of Group 3, the only one who is actually a teacher already had experience in distance teaching), but do report the difficulties of the Roma student population related to socioeconomic shortcomings that, in relation to school, were reflected in difficulties regarding access to the internet, for example, which are also mentioned by the other two groups.

3.2.3. Perspective of the Families

The participants asked about the impacts of COVID-19 on school and family life also give convergent opinions, in that the difficulties experienced by each group complement one another, and involve the roles of the persons comprising these groups within the school system: while the young people found it difficult to adapt to online education, and report that their academic performance declined, the group of parents recounts having found it difficult to support their children in studying and in helping them to create strategies to organize their schoolwork and school routines inside the home:

"I just said, there's been a complete decline in my children, completely. Why do I think my children showed a decline? Because of their habits, because they don't follow schedules, basically. They're at home, they're protecting themselves, right, they're not always outside, basically, they live indoors and so, what happens? At home, they don't have hardly anything to do, they don't feel like doing their schoolwork, they sleep, as if they would do it (…) And at school, they had to go to school, socialize with other children, might not seem that way, but they had other activities, more motivation to do their schoolwork, to do better, and like this there isn't that, and this situation is more difficult." (Male activist, Lisbon)

The pandemic has largely banished young people from the context of relationships with others provided by school, and that the lack of socializing has generated some demotivation and apathy. Moreover, the scarcity of computer equipment and access to information online has hindered their follow-up and understanding of educational materials. Here, it should be said that a number of local institutions and civic societies reorganized themselves and, in some cases, provided equipment and follow-up. However, the real scale of the effects of the pandemic on early school-leaving and academic underachievement is unknown.

4. Discussion

Systemic and historical racism toward Roma is deeply rooted in the very structures of Portuguese society (Bastos et al. 2007; Mendes 2007; Silva 2014). Occasionally, this may actually seem to be apparently "dormant" for some time, but the pandemic has rekindled and strengthened feelings and expressions of racism in relation to Portuguese Roma. The historical and structural inequalities (Bastos et al. 2007) have been exacerbated and the impacts of the pandemic have been multifaceted; for many Roma, the major priority has been to assure subsistence and attending to the basic needs of their household. Racist perceptions and feelings are manifested by some politicians, and also by people in general, on social networks, with the exacerbation of hate speech.

Digital media has played, and continues to play, an important role in the spreading of manifestations of racism and xenophobia against the Roma, both by politicians and in the comments shared by anonymous or named citizens through social networks. In Romania, Facebook discussions, posts, and the media coverage of the outbreak of COVID-19 in the country blame the Roma for spreading this disease, and consider them responsible for contaminating the Romanian nation, likewise in other central and southern European countries (Plainer 2020; Costache 2020). Whenever news about the Portuguese Roma is published, social networks such as Facebook recurrently backlash with a proliferation of racist comments (this is also evident in the links of one of the main Portuguese daily newspapers, the *Público*).[4] Once again, the Roma have become a scapegoat, been held responsible for contagion, faced manifest rejection (Berta 2020), been pelted with accusations of being "antisocial", of not observing the confinement rules, of disrespecting the rules on social distancing and hygiene, and accused of continuing to travel around and engage in very intense sociability (cultural specificities). The resurgence of these racist narratives that are incitements to hatred of the Roma people, that are offensive and humiliating, that legitimize the existing structural and institutional inequalities, demonstrate the fact that the Roma have been a major target throughout history and that racism remains embedded in the collective memory and in the ideological and political frameworks of the Portuguese. The attacks on Roma populations are inscribed in a much broader context, marked by historically systemic and structural discrimination that is deep-rooted in its society and its institutions. Likewise, racism on a daily basis (Essed 1991) is firmly entrenched in Portuguese society, encapsulated as a complex of accumulated practices, manifesting as banal, "normal" and legitimate. This racial differentiation also arises in the form of "softer" designations such as "ethnicity" or "ethnic minority" or, as Bader (2008, p. 85) refers to ethnicity, as a contained concept in which the most varied criteria of strict closure are the combined, real or assumed common characteristics of skin color, the territory of common origins, culture, habits, lifestyles, etc. But, for these authors, we cannot forget that at the center of racist categorizations are socially defined criteria, externally visible and at the core of ethnic categorizations as socio-historical or cultural criteria (Bader 2008, p. 85). Generalization and stigmatization are implicit, as noted by Memmi (1993), since the individual is no longer considered a person but is, rather, merely labeled as a member of a social group that has negative features and a negative identity. Here, the accusation is unlimited by time and covers all the group's members (Mendes 2020).

The Roma are almost always considered as a homogenous mass, in a stereotyped manner, but they are not all the same, nor do they all live in the same way (Magano, 2010). Some identify themselves as Roma, but neither fall within a profile of poverty or social exclusion, nor reside in specific territorial contexts of a concentration of families, nor in poor housing conditions (Magano 2013). Other individuals and families have lifestyles that are closer to the classic portrayal of Roma tradition and live a "Roma lifestyle" (Mendes 2007; Magano 2010). Many have embarked on life trajectories marked by educational attainment and employment in areas not traditionally explored by Roma, but even so, they are frequently confronted with representations and stereotypes about their "being an untrustworthy sort of people", "traffickers", "nomads", etc. (Magano 2010; Silva 2014). In the professional world, many of those who worked in fairs and markets have readapted and started to engage in online selling via Facebook, in reaction to having been barred from selling in public places, which has obviously led to a drastic reduction in their income level.

It should be highlighted that the housing conditions in which many Roma still live have also suffered a further worsening of sanitary situations of major complexity, which stubbornly persist in many national territories. The situation of Roma who live in spontaneous settlements (e.g., in Bairro da Torre in Camarate), in tents and caravans (e.g., in Évora) or in the street (the forced evictions in Bairro Bensaúde, Lisbon) is particularly precarious, inhumane, and represents a risk in sanitary terms. These circumstances are

inconsistent with the social distancing measures, the confinement rules and with the required hygiene practices, in addition to the fact that there are many children whose housing conditions do not enable them to follow education by digital means. Their degree of exposure to this pandemic was and continues to be enormous (Mendes 2020).

In this article, we found that in Portugal, structural racism and daily racism persist in relation to Roma people, and that it is possible to verify this in various dimensions of life, not only in housing, training, access to employment or education but also in everyday social relations. In some way, racism against Roma is normalized and accepted by non-Roma, and they are often seen as directly responsible for the situation in which they find themselves. An example of this situation of racialization is the issue of education, in which responsibilities are attributed to the Roma people and also to Roma cultural issues, but not to structural problems in the education system or pedagogic issues. It is extremely worrying to see the inability of the education system to incorporate Roma culture and to promote plural and comprehensive educational policies, capable of being attractive to all students.

The educational landscape of Roma people is still not very favorable, and continues to demonstrate high percentages of school dropout, and educational paths marked by retentions and a hint of racist attitudes on the part of the teaching team, which tend to highlight negative and stereotyped aspects about Roma people, such as the preconception that "everyone gets married early".

In turn, the reflective analysis presented by the young people shows them having to permanently demonstrate their value and their ability to learn, which is always required more of Roma than of other young people. In the case of the concept of agency and the articulation between individual agency and social change (Giddens 2004), this involves an individual agency used to benefit the deconstruction of stereotypes relative to the Roma identity, and its relationship with the social impacts of the pandemic, which are reflected in the "isolation" of a symbolic and/or identity capital that is no longer able to interact with or relate to others; in other words, an identity that can no longer grow as capital but which also highlights the material difficulties of the families and students in successfully overcoming these new educational challenges.

5. Conclusions

In fact, in view of the situation of pandemic calamity, the state took universal decisions without taking into account the diversities between households concerning access to computer technology, access to the internet, the possibility of family tutoring to support schoolwork, and very often, the lack of comfortable and salubrious housing conditions.

The historical and socially consistent racialization and discrimination vis-à-vis Portuguese Roma (Bastos et al. 2007) seem to be associated with a combination of defensive strategies (behaviors marked by a certain closure and a greater separation between real and virtual social identity, which includes explicit allusions to the "secret of the group", as demonstrated by Roma) and offensive strategies by those discriminated against (visible expressions of revolt, which include recourse to options that may arouse fear on the part of the majority, manifested in externalized, emotional, uncontrolled, verbal and/or symbolic violence, etc.) (Mendes 2007). In fact, the racialization of poverty expresses itself as a "practice of coupling 'the Roma', perceived as the 'racial other', with 'the poor', and explaining 'Roma poverty' as a 'natural result' of the cultural traits of an 'inferior race' trapped in pre-modern ('non-civilized') and subhuman forms of existence" (Vincze 2014, pp. 445–46). In conclusion, in Portugal, the tolerance and acceptance of the state and society of poverty and marginalization of Roma people is an aspect that is still seldom explored in the literature. However, based on the empirical evidence presented, it seems clear that this attitude is part of the historical processes of racialization and antigypsyism to which they continue to be subject, and this dimension needs to be further investigated by scientific agendas.

Notes

1 Council of Ministers Resolution 154/2018, Diário da República, 1st series, No. 230, 29 November 2018.
2 This project is funded by the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT), coordinated by Maria Manuela Mendes and co-coordinated by Olga Magano.
3 https://ionline.sapo.pt/artigo/695215/chega-quer-plano-of-confinamento-especifico-para-comunidade-cigana?seccao=Portugal_i (accessed on 28 May 2021)
4 https://www.facebook.com/Publico/posts/10159561434756983 (accessed on 28 May 2021); https://www.facebook.com/Publico/posts/10158687090611983 (accessed on 28 May 2021); https://www.facebook.com/Publico/posts/10158687270301983 (accessed on 28 May 2021).

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